

**What is giardiasis?** Giardiasis (GEE-are-DYE-uh-sis) is an illness caused by a microscopic parasite, *Giardia intestinalis* — also known as *Giardia lamblia*. Once an animal or person has been infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and is passed in the stool.

**How do you get giardiasis and how is it spread?** The *Giardia* parasite lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of germs can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal.

*Giardia* is found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite. You cannot become infected through contact with blood.

**Giardia can be spread by:**

- Accidentally putting something into your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with feces of a person or animal infected with *Giardia*.
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Giardia*. Recreational water includes water in swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*.
- Accidentally swallowing *Giardia* picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) contaminated with feces from an infected person.

**What are the symptoms of giardiasis?** *Giardia* infection can cause a variety of intestinal symptoms, which include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas or flatulence
- Greasy stools that tend to float
- Stomach cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea.

These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with giardiasis have no symptoms at all.

**How long after infection do symptoms appear?** Symptoms normally begin one or two weeks (average 7 days) after becoming infected.

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**How long will symptoms last?** In otherwise healthy persons, symptoms may last two to six weeks. Occasionally, symptoms last longer.

**Who is most likely to get giardiasis?** Anyone can get giardiasis. Persons more likely to become infected include:

- Children who attend day care centers, including diaper-aged children
- Child care workers
- Parents of infected children
- International travelers
- People who swallow water from contaminated sources.
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- Swimmers who swallow water while swimming in lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams
- People who drink from shallow wells

Contaminated water includes water that has not been boiled, filtered, or disinfected with chemicals. Several community-wide outbreaks of giardiasis have been linked to drinking municipal water or recreational water contaminated with Giardia.

**What should I do if I think I may have giardiasis?** See your health care provider.

**How is a Giardia infection diagnosed?** Your health care provider will likely ask you to submit stool samples to check for the parasite. Because it can be difficult to diagnose, your provider may ask you to submit several stool specimens over several days.

**What is the treatment for giardiasis?** Several prescription drugs are available to treat Giardia. Although Giardia can infect all people, young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should, therefore, drink plenty of fluids while ill.

**How can I prevent a Giardia infection?** Practice good hygiene. Follow these guidelines:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling or eating food — especially for persons with diarrhea.
- Wash hands after every diaper change, especially if you work with diaper-aged children, even if you are wearing gloves.
- Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea (essential for children in diapers).
- Avoid water that might be contaminated.
- Do not swallow recreational water.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams.
- Do not drink untreated water during community-wide outbreaks of disease caused by contaminated drinking water.

- Do not use untreated ice or drinking water when traveling in countries where the water supply might be unsafe. In the United States, nationally distributed brands of bottled or canned carbonated soft drinks are safe to drink. Commercially packaged non-carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices that do not require refrigeration until after they are opened (those that are stored un-refrigerated on grocery shelves) also are safe.

If you are unable to avoid using or drinking water that might be contaminated, then you can make the water safe to drink by doing one of the following:

- Heat the water to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute, OR
- Use a filter that has an absolute pore size of at least 1 micron or one that has been NSF rated for "cyst removal."

If you cannot heat the water to a rolling boil or use a recommended filter, then try chemically treating the water by chlorination or iodination. Using chemicals may be less effective than boiling or filtering because the amount of chemical required to make the water safe is highly dependent on the temperature, pH, and cloudiness of the water.

**Avoid food that might be contaminated.** Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw. Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries with minimal water treatment and sanitation systems.



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